

## Libération Tardive Foundation Hosts Landmark Château Grillet Tasting

[London, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024] – On a sweltry London evening in St James's, the Libération Tardive Foundation hosted its inaugural event to celebrate the timeless art of ageing wine. This exclusive tasting on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> June featured four remarkable verticals from the esteemed Château Grillet, including the fourth flight tasted blind. Bringing together leading wine writers, five Masters of Wine and avid connoisseurs, the evening proved to be a ringing endorsement of the Foundation's core belief and mantra: 'Great wines take time.'



*Celebrating the inaugural tasting of the Libération Tardive Foundation at 67 Pall Mall*

In the Lutyens Room at 67 Pall Mall, Dominic Buckwell, a director of the Foundation, raided his club cellar and presented ten vintages of Château Grillet. Serving three of the wines blind, the experts generally agreed that while terroir, winemaking and age-related variations all play a part, the additional decade or more in bottle allows fine wines like Grillet to express their full potential.

For **Jancis Robinson MW OBE**, “the most fascinating wine was the 2015, with all of 15.5% alcohol. It was clearly oxidative but not oxidised. Sui generis, though by no means a template for other vintages.”

John Livingstone-Learmonth, of Drink Rhône acclaim, singled out 2009 as “A benchmark Château Grillet, bingo maximus! Structured and linear with an intricate construction and notes of le bon Sud on the palate. It holds the requisite depth of former days that I knew as a young man, displaying intrinsic grace and floral complexity with a seasoning of minerality. The wine of the evening for me, it will just keep going for another twenty years, easily.”

The 2009 was declared as ‘wine of the night.’ **Anne McHale MW** noted it as “remarkably youthful, both in appearance and on the nose, for a 15-year-old wine. And yet on the palate it indicates the value of ageing these wines, since it is far more expressive than the slightly closed younger vintages. It shows the most typically 'Viognier-like' characteristics so far with elegant notes of peach, honeysuckle and exotic fruits. It has a wonderfully cushiony texture – broad and luscious but still a dry-feeling wine with a savoury edge, balanced by an even acidity and with the 14% alcohol only subtly evident.” Some of the other older vintages from the early 2000s, produced under the previous ownership, garnered a mixed reception.

The event marked the seminal tasting of the recently established Libération Tardive Foundation, a global non-profit dedicated to reinvigorating the market and appreciation for the timeless tradition of ageing fine wines. Founded by a group of passionate wine experts from the UK and across Europe, Libération Tardive seeks to emphasize the transformative power of time on fine wines, a concept that has been largely overshadowed by modern consumption trends and the financial motivations of cash flow efficiency.

**Christopher Burr MW** affirmed “whilst winemaking skills have improved markedly in recent decades, enabling many wines to be released and enjoyed young, a small group of us have been increasingly concerned that maturing and nurturing a great wine is seen as far less fashionable nowadays. Producers, merchants and even collectors are seemingly in a perpetual race to seek out the latest vintages.” He went on to say: “... often wines, that on release were rated less well or a lesser vintage, with good maturity become sublime and a great surprise in latter years.”

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The wine flights of the evening spanned from the 2018 vintage back to 2001, revealing the transformative effects of ageing on these exceptional wines and exemplifying both the depth and complexity that time can bring. “This impressive inaugural tasting of back vintages of Château Grillet amply proves the point and raison d’être of Libération Tardive” commented John Stimpfig, of The Wine Conversation. “Great, age-worthy wines really do need time in bottle to show their best. There’s no doubt in my mind that more attention needs to be paid to this by the trade and consumers.”

Whereas **Richard Bampffield MW** reflected “As a Château Grillet novice, this was very much an education as much as an exceptional wine tasting experience. I was surprised and delighted by the delicacy and finesse of the wines, but it was only in the more mature vintages that I started to find real character and personality.”

Château Grillet is a tiny yet historic monopole nestled in the northern Rhône Valley, just south of Vienne where the Rhône River cuts into the granitic Massif Central, providing an extraordinary steep, south-facing natural amphitheatre. As one of the world’s most iconic vineyard sites, Château Grillet’s exclusivity is heightened by its dedication within the AOC to producing solely 100% Viognier wines. The vineyard’s celebrated past includes visits by Thomas Jefferson and favour at the court of Napoleon Bonaparte. After a challenging period of inconsistency and decline, the estate was reinvigorated in 2011 by the Groupe Artémis of François Pinault, implementing significant improvements in vineyard management and winemaking.

Christopher Burr MW explained, “Possibly the most notable of these improvements included the lowering of yields, retraining and certain Selection Massale replanting of vines, building a new winery and reducing the use of new oak to less than 10% to allow the complexity of the wine to predominate. Nowadays they are vinifying in small separate parcels and being highly selective, including declassifying more to a second wine, Côtes du Rhône Blanc. Moreover, the new winemaker Chu Jaeok is steadfastly committed to restoring Château Grillet to its esteemed position among the wine elite.”

The event sparked vigorous discussion among attendees about how best to promote the benefits of ageing wine to the newer generations of consumers. Attendees focused on how best to demonstrate the value proposition of older vintages, coupled with an exploration of ways to support the logistics and marketing of mature wines, on a global basis. “It’s worth reminding ourselves - and fellow wine lovers - that so many of the world’s greatest wines only truly reveal themselves and fulfil their potential with time” added Matt Walls, author of *Wines of the Rhône*.

Pauline Vicard of ARENI Global summarised the essence of the evening in characteristic lyrical style: “Fine wine is an expression of time. These wines express the vision of their winemakers, who only get one chance a year to turn this vision into tangible reality. Fine wine also evolves and transforms over the years, making it something magical – a connection through time and place. More prosaically, this capacity to age is what makes these fine wines so desirable on the secondary market. The desirability of a wine can only increase if the quality of the wine improves while its availability decreases.”

Looking ahead, the mission of the Libération Tardive Foundation is clear: to educate, promote and celebrate the joys of well-aged wines. By fostering an appreciation for mature wines and in supporting producers, merchants and auction houses, the Foundation advocates for both the commercial and organoleptic virtues of patience and extended ageing. It aims to fundamentally shift consumer perceptions, ensuring that the art of ageing wine is preserved for future generations.

“It is vital to defend la culture du vin so that new generations become aware of the glory, history and mystery of mature wine. I am delighted that Libération Tardive will be contributing to the defence and promotion of this enriching cultural heritage” concluded John Livingstone-Learmonth.

[1,216 words]

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Media downloads including hi-res imagery: <https://liberation-tardive.org/media/>

### *Notes to the Editors:*

**Tasting guests:** Jancis Robinson MW OBE, John Livingstone-Learmonth, Richard Bampfield MW, Anne McHale MW, Andy Howard MW, Christopher Burr MW, Pauline Vicard, John Stimpfig and Matt Walls.

"I've hardly ever tasted Château Grillet, as it doesn't generally come into basic training!" remarked Hugh Johnson, who was unable to attend on this occasion.

### **Wines tasted and their current (in bond) market prices**

- Stéphane Ogier, Les Vieilles Vignes de Jacques Vernay, Condrieu 2018 at 13.5% abv: £60
- Côtes du Rhône du Grillet 2018 (2<sup>nd</sup> wine) at 14% abv: £120
- Château Grillet 2018 at 14.5% abv: £300
- Château Grillet 2017 at 15.5% abv: £290
- Château Grillet 2016 at 14% abv: £270
- Château Grillet 2015 at 15.5% abv: £270
- Château Grillet 2014 at 14% abv: £280
- Château Grillet 2009 at 14% abv: £270
- Château Grillet 2007 at 14% abv: £250
- Château Grillet 2006 at 14% abv: £230
- Château Grillet 2004 at 14% abv: £250
- Château Grillet 2001 at 13.5% abv: £270

### **About Libération Tardive Foundation**

Libération Tardive aims to educate and inspire the wine community, wine lovers and newcomers alike about the transformative effects of extended ageing, proactively encouraging the appreciation of wines aged over a decade. By providing comprehensive resources and support, the Foundation seeks to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of aged wines among growers, retailers and consumers. In highlighting the nuanced changes that occur in wines as they mature, it advocates for patience and judicious cellaring curation.

Key planned initiatives include:

- **Educational Content:** Detailed guides on the science and art of ageing wines, explaining how factors like acidity, tannins, and storage conditions contribute to the development of complex flavours over time.
- **Historical Perspectives:** Insights into traditional practices such as the En Primeur system and the evolution of wine trading, showcasing how historical methods can inform current appreciation.
- **Support and Membership:** Opportunities for wine producers, merchants and enthusiasts to join the movement, contribute their expertise and support the cause financially.

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With a mandate to rekindle the magic that comes with patiently ageing wines, the Foundation will foster a global community that values the interplay of time and terroir and is set to become a beacon for the enduring art of wine ageing.



*Libération Tardive Foundation™ ... great wines take time*

*(left to right: Dominic Buckwell, James Belton, Fran Bridgewater FCIM, David Pinchard and Christopher Burr MW)*

### About Château Grillet

Originally established as a vineyard at the time of the Roman Empire, with the first plots said to have been planted by Emperor Probus in the third century, Château Grillet has a legacy that spans millennia. However, not until the 18th century did the estate gain prominence for its winemaking prowess. Under the ownership of the Neyret-Gachet family since the 1820's, Grillet was awarded its own appellation in 1936 by the precursor to INAO. Today it remains a Designation of Origin protected under EU law and international treaties and the purchase of the property by François Pinault in the summer of 2011 marked a significant new chapter in Grillet's renaissance.

The vineyard is perched on steep granite terraces overlooking the Rhône River, for optimal sun exposure and drainage. The vines are low yielding with an average age of 45 years and the soils are a complex combination of clay and decomposed granite, with quartz, feldspar and some mica deposits. Divided into 76 dry-stone wall terraces, known locally as 'chaillées', the vineyard is characterised by crescent-shaped slopes that rise dramatically 300 feet above the river, providing shelter from the cold north wind of La Bise.

Château Grillet wines are celebrated for their aromatic intensity and impressive aging potential, regularly maturing gracefully over the period of a decade or more.

As one of the smallest and oldest appellations in France, the Château Grillet AOC is used exclusively for still white wines made from Viognier. By law, the planting density must be at least 8,000 vines per hectare, with yields not exceeding 37 hectolitres per hectare. The grapes, all picked by hand, need to reach a maturity providing at least 178 grams per litre of sugar in the must (corresponding to minimum 10.5% potential alcohol) and the finished wines must have an alcohol content between 11.5% and 14%, with a maximum of 4 grams per litre of sugar.

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Despite its modest 3.5-hectare expanse, Château Grillet stands as a timeless classic in the illustrious world of fine wines, its name whispered with reverence among oenophiles across the globe.